

Is meat eating spiritual?

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Many people consider meat eating as a worldly and debased practice. Meat is 'unclean' and the product of slaughtered or murdered animals. Some religions, particularly Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism, shun or even prohibit meat eating. Mahayana Buddhism points to several Mahayana Sutras which explicitly denounce meat eating. It is also said that the higher gods do like meat. Therefore, is meat eating a debased practice?

In the Surangama Sutra, Sakyamuni Buddha said:-

"Ananda, I permit the Bhikshus to eat five kinds of pure meat. This meat is actually a transformation brought into being by my spiritual powers. It basically has no life-force. Those of you Brahmans who live in a climate so hot and humid, and on such sandy and rocky land, that vegetables will not grow. I have had to assist you with spiritual powers and compassion. Because of this magnanimous kindness and compassion, this so-called meat suits your taste"

Buddha Sakyamuni mentioned 5 kinds of pure meat are allowed on only one condition. ie. for those disciples, who live in those barren rocky sandy dessert areas that no vegetables can grow, he will manifest meat for them.

My question is:- Why manifest meat but not vegetables to satisfy and arouse greed for the taste of murdered beings? If Buddha Sakyamuni is totally against meat eating, he should manifest vegetables for his hungry monks. But we know he admitted he manifested meat! Illogical? Paradox, eh?

Is it possible that Buddha Sakyamuni, realising that some disciples still cling to meat, and thus to allow them sustenance, he allowed them to satisfy their gratification on meat? In this case, Buddha Sakyamuni did not prohibit meat eating per se. "If you still need to eat meat, Buddha Sakyamuni will cause conditions to manifest meat for the sustenance of his disciples. Do not think that these meat have real life force. This is an illusory world. These are illusory beings that have taken illusory birth in an illusory world for illusory beings with illusory greed for illusory meat.

The Surangama Sutra also stated that Buddha Sakyamuni referred to meat eaters as "..... great rakshasas. When their retribution ends, they are bound to sink into the bitter sea of birth and death".

In Theravadan Buddhist tradition, it is well known that all the bhikshu disciples of Buddha Sakyamuni, including the major arhants, ate meat as part of the food offered to them. Buddha Sakyamuni not only allowed it, but he himself practised alms begging, which means that he himself ate meat. He did not discriminate between meat and non meat. Therefore, this sutra statement is not definitive, but interpretive in meaning because Buddha Sakyamuni, in condemning meat eating, had condemned himself and his arhant disciples.

How to resolve this contradiction? One way is to regard the teaching of Buddha Sakyamuni on meat eating is actually about the inner realisation and contemplation of

the illusory nature of all phenomena and non discrimination of good and bad, and hence non attachment to ideas of meat and non meat. Do not think meat or non meat. Do not get attached to this dualistic idea. Aloft from ideas of sacredness or profanity, simply be aware of all phenomena that are happening without getting trapped by attachment or revulsion.

If the basic idea of not eating meat is not to hanker after the taste or idea of meat eating, why do so many Mahayana Buddhist monks love fake meat dishes such as "cha siu" and "fried fish" etc?

These monks and their followers are not eating actual meat, but they love cooking delicacies in the form of and taste of animal meat. To them, allowing their desires and greed for the taste of murdered being to be aroused is permissible. From the actions of many Mahayanist Buddhists, it appears that following the actual words of the Buddha Sakyamuni is more important than abiding by his intention. Is this correct?

Thus, Buddha might manifest nice tasty "cha siu" (Chinese roast pork) to satisfy the taste buds of his monks when there are in a very rocky sandy place. He might perhaps also create golden palaces and beautiful women for them too, out of compassion - while reminding them that these are the 5 types of pure women, and are without real life force that they can play and amuse themselves on without committing any transgression of celibacy vows. They are not allowed to debase themselves on actual women but they can impregnate these illusory women that he created for them? They might even ejaculate as much as they want during copulation because these are illusory beings created out of the Buddha's compassion for very hard up monks who practise in very desolate places without any beautiful women. Is this logic right? Is this interpretation right?

It is no use to excusing the Buddha by saying that due to past habits and propensities, the disciples have greed and hatred in them, so they need meat to satisfy themselves. But he himself criticised such habits severely! He himself condemned meat eating. He condemned feeding and fanning the fires of greed and hatred. He gave no room to greed and hatred. In fact, the Mahayana sutras explicitly stated that Buddha condemned meat eating because of the greed and hatred it generated.

The gist of the Mahayana sutras's opinion on meat eating is that it is an absolute NO, NO, NO!!! because it generates greed hatred and killing again and again as the cause of evil birth. And there is no room for compromise for greed and hatred.

Oh yeah? Did I hear "no room for compromise for greed and hatred? Yes, I did.

But did I also hear that Buddha manifested and think that it is so right and great to manifest meat for disciples in some drought-stricken god-forsaken barren land? Yes! Instead of fruits and vegetables? Yes! This is unacceptable to me. That sutra is not talking sense?

It is actually sentient beings ignorance and non-understanding that is at fault.

The sutras stated principles, not facts. We have to understand what the sutras are trying to tell us. The sutras were also spoken by an Indian, and to a primarily Indian audience, which prizes vegetarianism as austerity as a way of cultivation. The Buddha's illustrious teachers before he attained his enlightenment were, in fact, great yogis on the path of austerity.

As I said, the problem is with people's understanding
The text mean very well - to deliver a strong message. But instilling strong messages in stupid religious people (I would call them 'nuts') is a dangerous thing. Lots of disharmony can arise from there because people start taking the texts word for word, and condemn those who do not conform to such fundamentalist approaches.

Instead of all this condemnation about meat and corruption, here is how the path should be:-

Leaving things as they are. Things are as they are, so do not make them what they are not. Just they are. Just I am. Just that. That is what it is. Do not add, do not subtract, do not do anything, do not 'not do nothing' either, what is - simply is. Simply that. Good or bad, what is that? Coming and going, what?? Appear and disappear, so what??? Just like that, is like that, so is like that - like that. No need to meat or not-meat. Point and point there - you have a crazy mind worse than a million monkeys. Just drop that monkey. Others's doings are none of your business. Look after yourself. Look inward and you will know. Look outward, and you will follow the way of existence. When the eyes look out, you follow the way of eye consciousness and eye existence. You discriminate and allow the desires, greed and hatred to manifest. When you follow the ears to go out, you exist in the existence of the ear consciousness. So, following all the 6 senses leads to the way of migratory existence, endless migration. Endless discriminations of good, bad, neutral. Just thinking and discrimination. That is existential habit. Sentient beings are sentient because of that. So, why discriminate between meat eating and not meat eating? Just be what you are - in your innate purity. This is the Pure Vision. Just naturally what you are.

Do not be attached to the sutras. Do not be attached to the Dharma.
They are the finger pointing to the moon. The moon is not the finger. Understand the principles what they teach. Do not be attached to the words of the sutras and masters.

Meat, no meat, king, beggar, monk, layperson, prostitute, these have nothing to do with the ultimate nature. Do not get bogged down with them. The sutras teach how to purify ourselves, and at various stages of our development, we need to do certain things and need to avoid certain things. These are for us, and us alone. These are not for everybody. What is true for you is RELATIVELY true for you alone, and is not true for others. What is true for others may not be true for you. You have a different bag of shit to carry. They have theirs. Don't carry their cross for them. Don't force them to carry yours. You don't eat their shit, so don't force your shit down their throat. Just do what you need to do and what helps you. There are many masters and texts and religious teachings that teach each part of the training. Take your training seriously

for what it is, and stop worrying about right and wrong about others. You need this particular training today, you need another training tomorrow. Next year, you need to discard this year's training. In future, you need to condemn your previous training. Then you have to change your views again later. It is all part of growing up in the spiritual family. No religion is right, none is wrong either. Together, they all make up the big picture.

A particular Tibetan Rinpoche stated:-

"In Tibet, there are many people who are strict vegetarian. Even in the big monasteries where there are huge gatherings of monks, they never eat non-vegetarian food. In the monk's individual quarters, though, there might be some monks who eat meat as food."

"Vegetarianism is something not very new in Tibetan society. Generally, in the old Tibetan society, most of the people try to avoid taking meat specifically killed to feed individual person. This is evident in very level of Tibetan society"

I think the above statements needs some correction:-

This is, as usually of all falsehoods, truth mixed in with a little falsehood to change the whole direction of an argument, using or rather abusing one's great and respected and authoritative status to bend the truth.

Sentence-by-sentence dissection:-

"In Tibet, there are many people who are strict vegetarian"

This is 100% correct! But, it is also correct for Malaysia, China, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada, England, Congo, Zimbabwe, Finland, Sweden, Fiji etc etc etc. It is true for about every country in the world. Even many Muslims and Jews are vegetarians. Certain Seventh Day Adventist are very strict vegetarians. Nothing wrong with the statement, but it is being used as a lead-up to a persuasion he is attempting.

"Even in the big monasteries where there are huge gatherings of monks, they never eat non-vegetarian food"

This is half truth. It is not true that monks in big (Tibetan) monasteries never eat meat! Neither is it true that meat is never consumed when there are large gatherings of monks, whether in large or small monasteries, neither when the premises are non monasteries.

However, it is true that in Gelugpa tsogs, especially in modern times, in India, because they are refugees who have learnt at little more about their Mahayana scriptures, they try to abstain from much meat eating. Some older monks advised to partake and taste the tsog, and not to really eat so much. Eat a piece of the meat tsog. Dip your finger into the wine and stick it into your mouth to taste it - don't drink the wine. That is the advice. "Taste, but do not eat"

But, this is a more recent development, and the most venerable gentleman is not telling you that. Moreover, the old gentleman said "never". That is outrageous.

He also said "there are huge gatherings of monks". This is true! In a great Dharma gathering, there can be 20,000 or 30,000 people, and I am satisfied if the old

gentleman asserts that there are a few thousands amongst those 20,000 to 30,000 monks who will not eat meat for that particular gathering - the key words are "a few thousand" and "that particular gathering". Many people who attend these religious gatherings abstain from meat even a few days before the gatherings - especially if the gathering involves rituals of a clean and pacifying type, such as on the Bodhisattvas Avaloketisvara or Tara. That is normal, so the statement is 100% correct in a restrictive way. But, my dissatisfaction with it is that it is used to imply that the general or majority of the monastic population are strict vegetarians. It is the persuasion and subliminal message he is subconsciously trying to engineer.

I also am a vegetarian when I go to the Chinese temples. I have asked quite a few people in Chinese temples whether they eat meat. Most do! But they will abstain from meat when they go to the temple. I would vigorously deny that we are strict vegetarians. Anybody who make insinuations and implications as such, is being irresponsible.

Let us break the sentence semantics down, you will get this:-

"Even in the big monasteries (where there are huge gatherings of monks), they never eat non-vegetarian food"

Subconsciously, the sentence may be cleverly engineered as:-

"Even in the big monasteries, they never eat non-vegetarian food"

The "where there are huge gatherings of monks" is cleverly inserted to amplify the idea of sacredness and that monks do not eat meat. Very clever words.

How about in non Gelugpa monasteries? In Sakya, it is half-half. In Kagyu, it is mostly meat can be eaten and wine drunk. In Nyingma, the practitioners are mostly not monks, but householders, so meat and wine are voluminous.

This old gentleman should speak for himself, his own monasteries, and his own sect, and not make sweeping statements for everybody else. Half truths do not make the whole truth.

"In the monk's individual quarters, though, there might be some monks who eat meat as food". This statement by the same old gentleman contradicts the previous strong sweeping statements he just made previously. That has my point all the while - as food. Ceremonial gatherings is different - in Gelug monasteries, as mentioned above, the old monks discourage much meat taking in their tsog feasts. But in daily life, the monks did as they wish. Not strict vegetarians. And it is not merely "some". The other way is more true - some monks are very devout to their old gurus, and emulate their old guru's example by abstaining from meat.

Taking both aspects together, you will conclude that there is no strict vegetarianism enforced, even in modern times.

"Vegetarianism is something not very new in Tibetan society"

As above, is it really new in any society? huh? This is double talk. Preparing the audience for the next few sentences.

"Generally, in the old Tibetan society, most of the people try to avoid taking meat specifically killed to feed individual person. This is evident in very level of Tibetan society"

I would say, generally, in most societies, except general Christian, Jewish and Islamic societies, there is a general concept not to harm and kill too many animals for food and other things. Even cultures which rely mostly on meat for sustenance, like the American Red Indians, do not take more than what is required, and they bless and thank the animals immensely for their meat. There is nothing so unique about Tibetan society in this regard. It is expected that they will have a kind thought for the animals and they would respect the animal kingdom by not killing too much. But it does not mean that they are vegetarians! Nor does it mean that the American Red Indians are vegetarians. The old gentleman is attempting to use a truth to bend to his persuasion. By using these sentences together, he is attempting to make a connection - that most people in Tibet try to avoid taking meat specifically killed to feed humans, so they mostly remain vegetarians, as a conclusion he would subtly like you to reach. He did not say that most of them are vegetarians, as that is an outright lie, but, he cleverly strings the sentences in such a way that the gullible will conclude more or less, hence, he gets his way.

FACTS

Meat is much more expensive in old Tibet, and the staple food is 'sampa' which is grounded barley/millet mixture. The Tibetans love sampa, much more than Chinese love rice, noodles and mantau. As some Tibetans will tell you, they would rather go with sampa alone if they don't have anything other food. Tibetans are not frequent users of spices like us. They like bland food. (Not talking about modern Tibetans). Tibet was a poor country like China 100/200 years ago.

Like the Chinese, meat was hard to come by since it was expensive. Our great grandparents sometimes eat meat a dozen or so times a year. A lot of the meat was salted after killing because it was so precious. Kill the pigs only 3 or 4 times a year, and quickly salt the meat so we can eat meat at different times of the year. This is not talking about the decadent rich families in the cities of course. This is talking about the general population, which is poor. The hundreds of millions of people in China. Not about the few hundred thousand rich decadents. The rich have a choice of extending their fabricated 'kindness' to the animals and ease their lousy filthy conscience by abstaining to kill a little less animals, out of their 'great compassion'. Yes, kill 90 animals instead of 100. So what? But that is not a privilege of the poor! The Tibetan situation is similar, if not the same. The learned old gentleman could have applied his same words to the Chinese! We also generally can be quoted to look down upon much animal killing, gambling, prostitution and soldiering. But, really, some Chinese also have a 'great' reputation for animal killing, gambling, prostitution and soldiering too! That makes sweeping statements very untenable.

And a great holy and spiritual man should be very careful not to make such statements, neither influence people by persuasion.

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